



Research Brief

Employer Practices and Policies Regarding the Employment of Persons with Disabilities

Overview

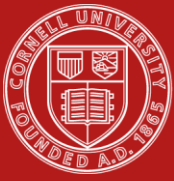
Employer practices and policies can have important implications for the hiring and retention of employees with disabilities. The employment rate for individuals with disabilities is less than half that of their non-disabled peers,¹ which makes it vital that we gain a better understanding of the potential barriers to employment that they face, as well as the employer policies and practices that can improve opportunities for them.

In the fall of 2011, Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute collaborated with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) on a survey of SHRM's private employer membership. SHRM is the world's largest association devoted to HR management, with over quarter of a million members worldwide, of whom 125,000 are U.S private employer members. The survey was designed to assess human resource (HR) professionals' perceptions of barriers to the employment of individuals with disabilities as well as to measure the level of implementation of disability inclusive practices and policies in their workplaces.

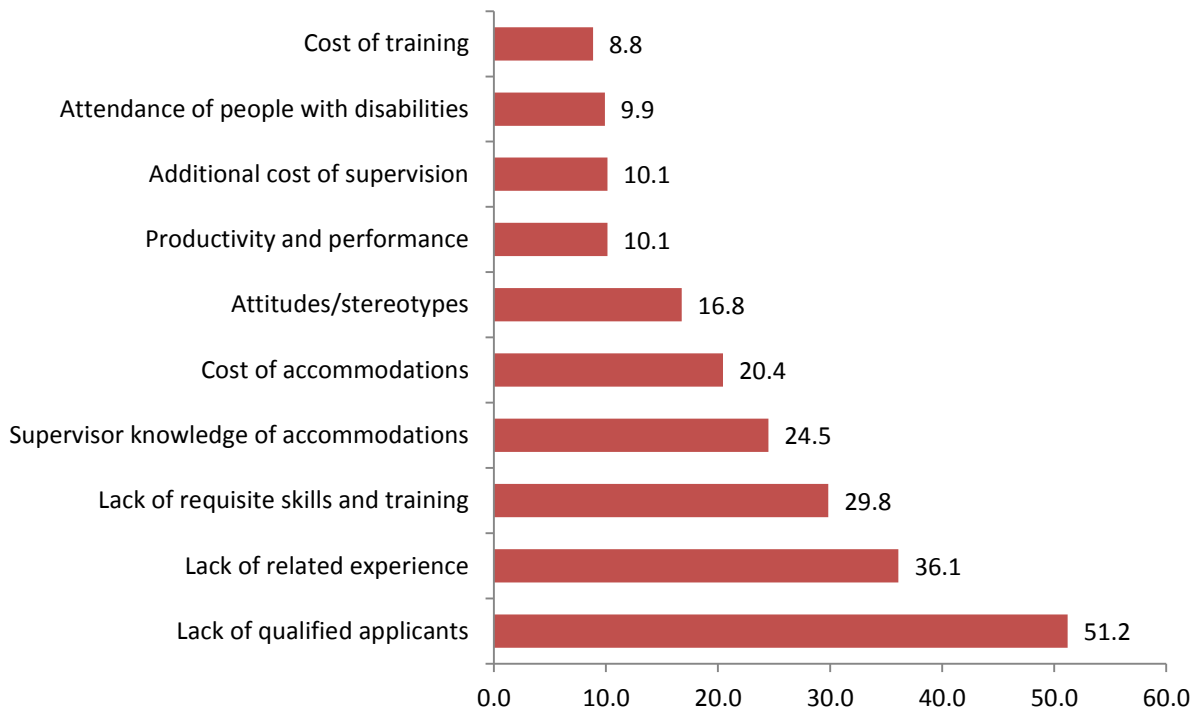
In total, 675 SHRM human resource members responded to the survey, a response rate of 23%. This brief summarizes the results and presents implications for employers.

Employer Perceptions of Barriers

The survey asked about ten specific potential barriers to the hiring and advancement of persons with disabilities. The three most often cited barriers reported by HR professionals related to skills and experience needed by applicants with disabilities. These included the perception of a lack of qualified applicants (51.2%), lack of skills and training on the part of individuals with disabilities (36%) and lack of related experience (29.8%). Two other often cited barriers were lack of supervisor knowledge about accommodations and attitudes and stereotypes of those in the workplace. See the chart below for employer perspectives on the other barriers. When compared to a Cornell survey of SHRM members conducted 15 years ago, fewer employers reported barriers to hiring and advancing individuals with disabilities.



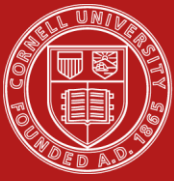
Barriers to Employment or Advancement Percent of Employers who Perceived Each as Barrier for People with Disabilities



Disability Inclusive Practices and Policies

Barriers such as those identified can be addressed with inclusive HR policies and practices. The figures below present a list of disability inclusive policies and practices and show the percentage of the responding organizations who have implemented each.

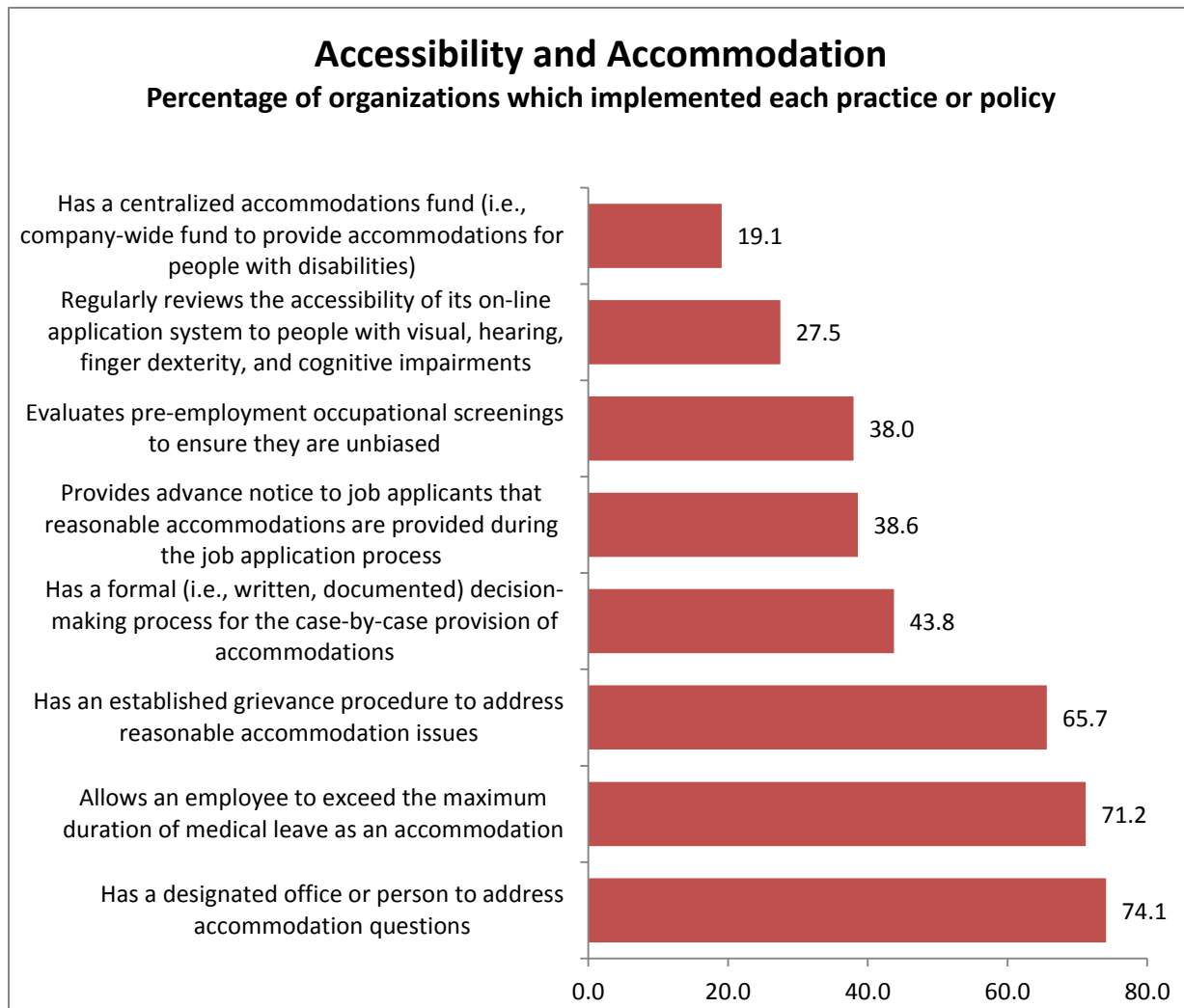
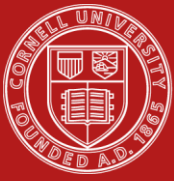
The policies and practices are arranged into parts of the employment process: 1) hiring and recruitment, 2) accommodation and accessibility and 3) retention and advancement. Respondents who had implemented these practices were further asked about their effectiveness.² Nearly all practices were viewed as effective or very effective by the majority of employers.



Recruitment and Hiring

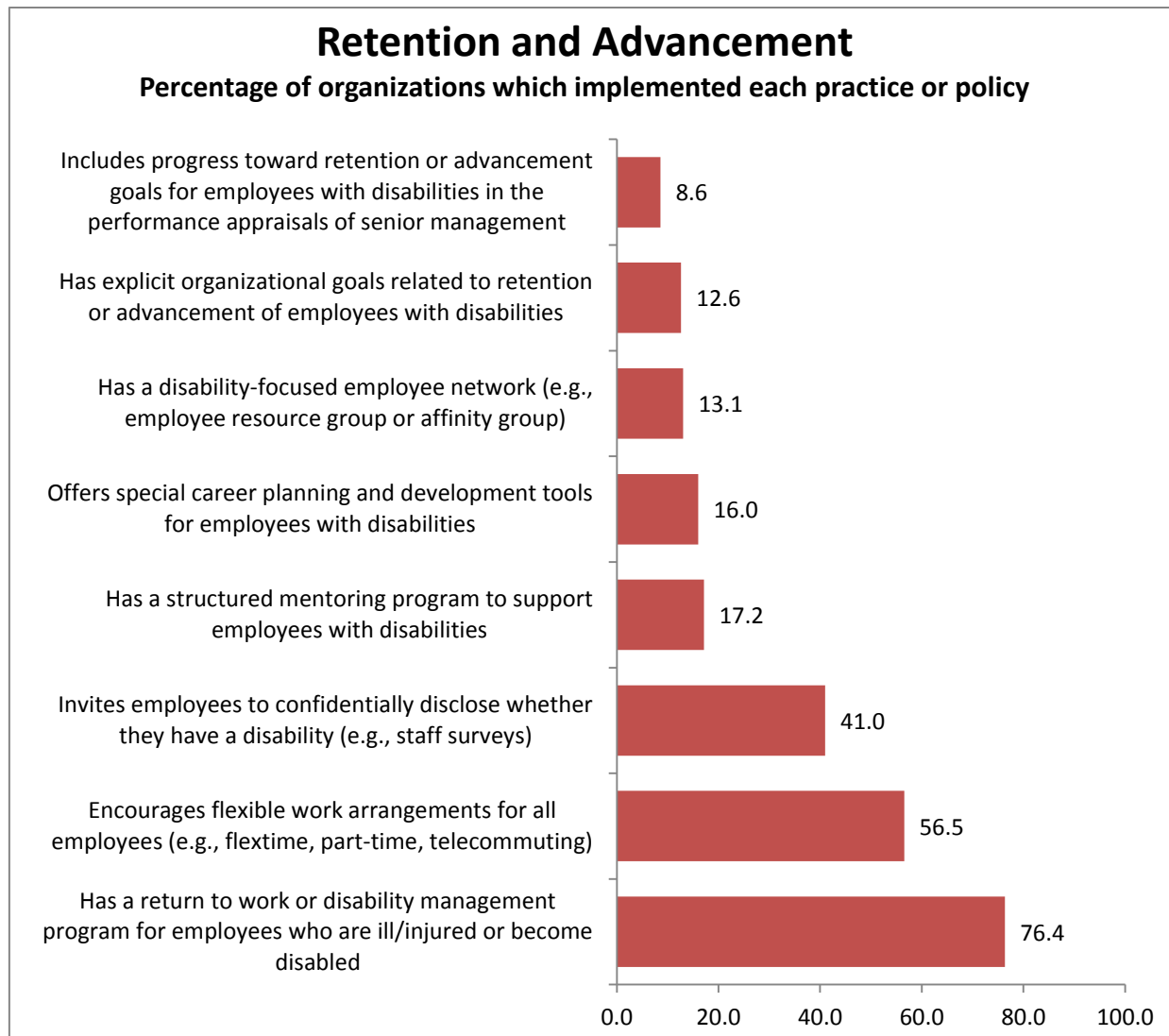
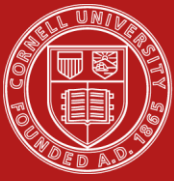
More than half of respondents noted that their organization includes people with disabilities in their diversity statement (58.8%), requires subcontractors to adhere to non-discrimination requirements (57.2%), and has relationships with community organizations that promote the employment of people with disabilities (53.9%).

Of special interest is that respondents whose companies had hired persons with disabilities at their location in the past 12 months were 2-3 times more likely to report that their company had each practice/policy in place when compared to those who had not hired a person with a disability.



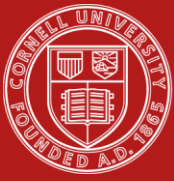
Accessibility and Accommodation

Nearly three quarters of employers had a designated office or person to address accommodation issues. About two-thirds had a grievance procedure and allowed employees to exceed the maximum medical leave duration as an accommodation. Slightly less than half (43.8%) had a formal decision-making process for accommodations. Results are shown in the chart above.



Retention and Advancement

Respondents were asked about eight specific retention and advancement policies and practices. Slightly over half encouraged flexible work arrangements (e.g., flextime, part-time, telecommuting) for all employees. About two in five invited employees to confidentially disclose whether they have a disability. The remaining practices were implemented by less than one in five organizations. The results are shown in the chart above.



Conclusion

Fewer employers are reporting barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities in their organization than 15 years ago. However, still over half the employers surveyed reported lack of qualified applicants as a barrier, and a quarter reported lack of supervisor knowledge of accommodations as a barrier.

Many organizations have implemented some of the promising employment practices included in the survey. Of the employers that have implemented the various practices/policies, the vast majority found each to be either effective or very effective. However, a large proportion -- in many cases a majority -- of employers surveyed have not done so. There is clearly a lot of progress still to be made in this area.

¹ Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2012). *2011 Disability Status Report: United States*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute.

² An "effective practice or policy" was defined as: "one that leads to improved recruitment, hiring, retention, engagement, workplace climate and/or advancement of people with disabilities." Ratings were: not effective, somewhat effective, very effective.

This brief was prepared by William Erickson and summarizes the forthcoming research article *The Employment Environment: Employer Perspectives, Policies, and Practices Regarding the Employment of Persons with Disabilities* by William Erickson, Sarah von Schrader, Susanne Bruyère, and Sara VanLooy to be published in an upcoming issue of *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*.

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